

Saskatchewan

'I don't feel like a person': Sask. long-term care resident says COVID restrictions affecting mental health

'It shouldn't take people losing their minds to sit up and take notice': Chelsea Dreher

[Emily Pasiuk](#) · CBC News · Posted: Oct 16, 2020 5:00 AM CT | Last Updated: October 16, 2020



Chelsea Dreher, right, and her mom Michelle. (Submitted by Chelsea Dreher)

[comments](#)



Chelsea Dreher misses her old life.

Dreher, who has cerebral palsy, has lived at Wascana Rehabilitation Centre in Regina for almost nine years.

The 31-year-old said she was a busy person before the COVID-19 pandemic. She visited family regularly. She hung out with friends. She could at least get a hair cut.

Now she is living in lockdown.

Provincial rules for the COVID-19 pandemic are forcing Dreher and others who live at the facility to stay put, with June 2021 as the current target for lifting restrictions on long-term care facilities in Saskatchewan.

“I don't feel like a person. I feel like cattle, like a number.”

- Chelsea Dreher

Visiting possibilities are limited. Most people aren't allowed to leave.

Dreher now has a special pass to see her parents at their home every few weeks and is allowed to see a friend who lives in another unit at a distance, but that's it. She only received these privileges after a mental breakdown from the isolation and loneliness.

"I knew there would be a process of quarantining, safety precautions, vaccines and stuff like that," she said. "But I didn't think we'd be locked in here for a year and a half."

She said she remembers waking up to people in her unit crying and "freaking out" on the day the quarantine phase of the plan was released.

The Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) issued a statement in response to questions about this situation.

"The Saskatchewan Health Authority has a number of safety protocols and measures in place to protect patients, residents and clients," the statement reads. "The SHA appreciates that

some of these measures might be challenging, but it is vital to protect those who are vulnerable to COVID-19."

It goes on to say that Wascana Rehab is following all protocols and that if people have concerns, they should call their local quality of care representative.

- [Experts say second widespread lockdown not likely in Sask., but vigilance needed to prevent second wave](#)

Dreher spent months in isolation unable to see her friends, get a coffee or leave the building. The only visiting allowed at the time was a distanced visit outside in a parking lot. Her worsening mental health took a turn in July when the situation led her to be put on suicide watch.

"I had been feeling hopeless and despondent. I didn't want to get out of bed in the morning. I was always crying," she said. "I just felt broken.

"I thought 'at least, if I were to die, then I could leave.'"

Dreher still struggles with a feeling of emptiness, but said it helps to see people and do her counselling sessions.

'It shouldn't take people losing their minds'

Dreher, along with her family, reached out to the SHA, their client services and others in government. While her mental health concerns were heard initially, eventually people stopped answering and her concerns about the long-term lockdown were not addressed, she said.

"I don't feel like a person. I feel like cattle, like a number," she said.

Dreher isn't only speaking for herself, she said, as others in the rehab centre have told her they feel the same way.

The cafeteria at Wascana Rehab is open for one hour a day and only staff are allowed to go. Residents still get food, but they don't have the freedom of grabbing a coffee, or a bagel to go with breakfast. Only designated visitors are allowed inside the building and only one person can visit a resident at a time.

- **'A tremendous slap in the face': Video of packed nightclub spurs anger in Saskatoon**

Dreher's parents are her two designated visitors. Although they live in the same house, they cannot come see her together. They must visit separately and only for up to an hour at a time.

Christmas is fast approaching and Dreher said people won't be allowed to spend it with their families. She said she feels left behind.

"I just want the government to start listening," Dreher said.

"It shouldn't take people losing their minds to sit up and take notice."

If you're experiencing suicidal thoughts or having a mental health crisis, there is help out there.

For an emergency or crisis situation, call 911.

You can also contact the Saskatchewan suicide prevention line toll-free, 24/7 at 1-833-456-4566, the Regina Mobile Crisis Services suicide line at 306-525-5333 or Saskatoon mobile crisis line at 306-933-6200.

Kids Help Phone can be reached at 1-800-668-6868 (phone) and live chat counselling at www.kidshelpphone.ca.

CBC Saskatchewan wants to tell more stories about how the pandemic is touching the province's most vulnerable and marginalized populations. How has COVID-19 affected you? Share your story with our [online questionnaire](#).

Visitez Radio-Canada.ca